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The Study of the British Commonwealth

An Inaugural Lecture

Delivered before the University of Oxford

on 19 November, 1921

BY

R. COUPLAND, M.A.

FELLOW OF ALL SOULS COLLEGE

BEIT PROFESSOR OF COLONIAL HISTORY

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Oxford University Press

London Edinburgh Glasgow Copenhagen

New York Toronto Melbourne Cape Town

Bombay Calcutta Madras Shanghai

Humphrey Milford Publisher to the UNIVERSITY

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THE STUDY OF THE BRITISH
COMMONWEALTH

THOSE of you who have read Professor Basil Williams's admirable biography will remember that Cecil Rhodes once began an address to a great business meeting in London by saying that 'he supposed the most unhappy thing in the world was for a public man to make a speech'. I venture to contest that claim. Public men, it is notorious, enjoy nothing so much as making speeches; but has any Professor ever enjoyed delivering an Inaugural Lecture? And can there be a more unhappy thing in the world than the delivery of an Inaugural Lecture before a University so critical as this and by a Professor so conscious as your present victim of his lack of almost all that is generally conceived to constitute the professorial stock-in-trade—the profound knowledge which only many years of toil can give, the authorship of several learned volumes, the venerable bearing—and so dependent, therefore, on your generosity when he asks that he be judged not by what he has done but by what he means to do?

And my diffidence is intensified when I reflect whose mantle it is that I am told to wear. When, fifteen years ago, Alfred Beit created this Chair with such far-sighted generosity, and in such happy consonance with the foundation of the Rhodes Scholarships by his life-long friend, there may have been some who thought that Colonial History was a 'fancy' subject, a side-track

from the old, well-trodden highway of historical teaching, attractive, indeed—if only because side-tracks are always, alas! attractive—but bordered by no such rich fields of research as is the main road, nor equipped with such famous store-houses of political experience, and leading dangerously near those forbidden haunts where the blare of trumpets and the blaze of flags reveal that the partisans and propagandists are making merry. But any such fears were quickly laid to rest by the first appointment to the Chair. Professor Egerton, beyond dispute, possesses a more thorough knowledge of Colonial History than any living man; and the wide learning, the lucid exposition, the scholarly judgement of his lectures and his writings soon proved—if proof indeed were needed—that the American Revolution, for example, was at least as fit and profitable a field for scientific study as the Revolution of 1688, and that political lessons could be learned from the development of self-government in the Dominions as well as in the Mother-country. And may I here declare, on behalf of many students known to me and not least of myself, the debt of gratitude we owe Professor Egerton for the instant sympathy and patient guidance he has given in such full measure to all who shared his own deep interest in the subject? It is a great gain not only to his successor, who means to go on drawing, if he may, on that never-failing store of knowledge and of friendship, but for the study of History throughout the University that his resignation has not meant his departure from Oxford.

The dread of this unhappy hour might well, indeed, have been my reason for postponing it for a year from the date of my appointment. But there have been other reasons. It seemed to me that the holder of a recently

founded chair might be expected to devote his first Public Lecture not so much to the exposition of some particular branch of his subject as to a brief discussion of the part which it should take in the work of the University: and to this end a little time was needed by one who had had small experience of the scope and method of the School of Modern History. A year ago, moreover, the School of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, which is also concerned with the study of Colonial History, was still in process of creation. Above all, the Oxford of 1920 was not the Oxford I had known in 1914. We have been forced to look at the world in a new perspective, to take an interest in matters to which we were once more or less indifferent, to reconsider our scheme of values in education as in other things. And if, on the whole, we come to the conclusion that no radical change is needed in the great tradition of Oxford studies, we are ready to admit that the conditions of this post-War age demand, in some subjects at any rate, a widening of the field of work or at least a shifting of emphasis from one part of it to another.

Of the study of History this seems to me particularly true. The development of the War presented to us, as it were, a continuous examination paper on History. And the results of it were devastating. Many of us, I fear, were 'ploughed' by the first question on Austria and the Balkans; and others went down before the second—'Describe exactly the origin and terms of the Treaty guaranteeing the neutrality of Belgium.' But the questions which betrayed most severely, perhaps, the limitations of our knowledge came later in the paper. When the people of the United States of America entered the war, when the magnitude of the contribu-

tion they made to the cause of the Allies in the short period allowed them revealed how vast was their potential strength, when, above all, it became manifest that the fortunes of the world in this new age depended first and foremost on a real understanding between this mighty Commonwealth and our own, we began to ask ourselves what we knew of its history, of its great men and great achievements, of its unique economic development, of the forces which have shaped its political ideals. And what sort of marks, I wonder, did we get for our answers? Happily an opportunity has been quickly given us to lighten our darkness: and I can speak for all Oxford in cordially welcoming the appointment of the first Harmsworth Professor of American History.

The War, in fact, has taught us, as nothing else could have done, how the sundering spaces of the world have shrunk before the swift advance of science. The lives of all its peoples have been brought intimately close together. A new idea is born, and in a moment it has run the circuit of the earth. A fine ideal, a perilous illusion, a resonant phrase may be uttered one day in London, Paris, Washington, Moscow: and on the morrow, oddly transmuted sometimes on the way, it is caught up and acclaimed and does its work for good or ill in India, Bokhara, Persia, Anatolia, Morocco, South Africa—where you will. And, binding continent to continent and nation to nation, runs the delicate, intricate web of their economic and financial interdependence. Human society, indeed, has become so close-knit, so complex an organism, that we may be tempted sometimes to wonder whether its brain is big enough to control its body. No one can doubt, at any rate, that much hard thinking must be done if the intellectual

equipment of mankind is to keep abreast of its growing moral and material needs. And this applies no less to the political than to the economic organization of the world. It has become not only foolish now but dangerous to cling to the old, contemptible doctrine that foresight and knowledge are not essential for the handling of great political issues because, when it comes to the point, we can always 'muddle through'. There will often enough be surprises in the world to test those gifts of improvisation and adaptability on which we pride ourselves. But politics is a science rather than an art; and we cannot with impunity omit to look afield and ahead, to detect the crucial problem, if we can, before the crisis is upon us, and to prepare ourselves betimes to solve it by scientific study.

History might well have taught this lesson before 1914. The greatest disaster in British annals was not primarily due to moral or social or economic or personal causes. We lost the thirteen American colonies primarily because we never closely studied the old Colonial System, never clearly analysed the political problem it contained, never made a real constructive effort to solve it. *Per contra*, the union of the thirteen American States in one commonwealth—one of the greatest achievements in history—could never have been effected without the preliminary study so thoughtfully and thoroughly pursued, and its results so admirably expounded, by Alexander Hamilton and his collaborators. The union of South Africa, again, which will one day be recognized as an even more remarkable achievement, was carried into being, it is true, on a wave of enthusiasm for a great idea; but the momentum would have been checked, the ardour chilled, the unique opportunity frittered away, if the cardinal difficulties

had not been thought out beforehand so that the constitutional framework of union could be swiftly and smoothly fashioned before the forces of disruption had time to rouse themselves and wreck it. And, to take a second failure for our fourth example, is it not reasonably certain that if the Irish problem had been treated as a problem of historical and political science, and studied in the light of the experience of multi-national federal states, it could have been solved, once for all, forty years ago?

But before a University audience it is hardly necessary to state a case for the scientific study of politics. The purpose of this lecture is to suggest the special opportunities for such study which are offered to us as citizens of the British Commonwealth, and to plead that these opportunities should not be neglected at Oxford, especially with regard to the two paramount political problems of our time.

The first of these problems is the problem of nationality—the problem which arises from the fact that a nation (whatever it is) is not, as current usage of the term might seem to imply, the same thing as a state. A whole course of lectures might well be devoted to this fascinating theme. But I must content myself to-day with emphasizing the vastly important part nationality is playing in the modern world. Though it only came to the forefront of European politics in the nineteenth century, its reactions were felt all over Europe and beyond before the century closed. The causes of the War were rooted in it. And to-day nationality, in one shape or another, is the most powerful and the most troublesome element in the whole complex of world-politics. The demon of an overweening and perverted

nationalism has not been wholly exorcized by the War, although all Europe is suffering from its fruits and the nation which most indulged it is paying the penalty in defeat and humiliation and poverty. Another nation in recovering its body has apparently lost its head. A group of nations are learning that the necessity of disrupting an ill-organized multi-national state does not in itself prove the validity of the shallow nineteenth-century doctrine that ideally all states should be uni-national. And, finally, this doctrine, under its new title of national self-determination, declaring that every nation has a positive right to be a state, has given a new impetus to nationalist movements not in Europe only but all over the world. It is manifest, indeed, that there can be little peace or prosperity on earth until certain truths concerning nationality are understood—that, for example, nations, like men, should strive to cherish and enrich their individuality not for themselves alone, but in order to make their contribution to the common treasure of humanity; that, in Mazzini's noble phrase, 'a nation is a living task, her life is not her own'; that somehow, in the end, the ideal of national freedom must be harmonized with the ideal of international unity.

For the study of questions such as these there exists no other political community comparable with the British Commonwealth in the quantity or diversity of the materials it contains. It is a great miscellany of nations, big and little, old and young. In some the spirit of nationality is satisfied and at peace. In others it is restless, rebellious, disruptive. At this moment the Commonwealth is alive with nationalist movements of varying character and intensity—right at its centre in Ireland, further afield in India and South Africa, and throughout that Near-Eastern border-country, just within

or just without its orbit, in Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia. On the happy issue of these movements how much depends! For the Commonwealth, in one of its two most vital aspects, is nothing else than an attempt, on a wider scale than anything that has preceded it, to solve that insistent problem of nationality; an endeavour to keep a motley company of nations living contentedly together both in freedom and in unity; a unique experiment in international relations. If it continues to succeed, as on the whole it has so far succeeded, it may do much to save mankind by its experience and example. If it fails, if the bond of a common tradition and a common purpose is snapped by the weight of narrower interests or less generous ideals, if it splits into a chaos of alien sovereignties, the hope of the world will be dimmed. If the British League of Nations dies, what other League can live?

Because of its general importance, then, in the life of the world to-day, and because of the particular part it has played, and has yet to play, in the destiny of the British Commonwealth, the study of nationality, and especially of our own British dealings with it, should form, I contend, an essential part in the work of every British student of history and politics. And nowhere, surely, could this study be more appropriately pursued than here at Oxford, itself an academic miniature of the Commonwealth, where the youth of all its nations meet in the brotherhood of learning. A thorough understanding of nationality, I suggest, should be the hall-mark of every twentieth-century Oxford historian. And while he should not by any means neglect its history in the world at large, he should make his special contribution to the general knowledge of the subject by studying and expounding the experience of the British Common-

wealth. He should be familiar, first of all, with the history of nationality in the British Isles—the growth of a national consciousness in the four nations they contain, the inevitable development of the problem of adjusting their mutual relations, the international conflict, its happy issue in Wales and Scotland, its tragic issue in Ireland. He should be acquainted, secondly, with the history of the same problem in Canada—where the juxtaposition of a conquered Celtic Roman Catholic population in the valley of the St. Lawrence and an immigrant Anglo-Saxon Protestant population in its *hinterland* created a situation so closely analogous at the outset to that of Ireland, but so fortunately and so instructively different in its development—and in South Africa, where the national schism, opened so needlessly by the Great Trek (one of the unwritten epics of nationality, by the way), was only closed again when the second and third generation had endured its heritage of strife and waste and death. Thirdly, he should have carefully studied the growth of what may be called Dominion nationality—how the four groups of contiguous colonies in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, divided at first either by nationality like England and Scotland, or by a jealous ‘particularism’ like the thirteen American States, gradually yielded to the forces, economic and political, which made for unity; how sooner, as in the case of New Zealand, or later, as in that of South Africa, the barriers were broken down and each group was welded together in a single constitutional frame, more loosely or more tightly as the case might be; how this political unification stimulated and quickened the process which, despite differences and disputes, had been silently going on all the time—the development of an inward unity, of which political

unity was but the outward expression; a sense of common devotion to the land they had made their home; a consciousness of the common customs and common interests which they shared as dwellers in one country, of something which made all who lived in Canada Canadians, whether they were of French or British blood, and all who lived in South Africa South Africans, whether they spoke Dutch or English; and, finally, as time went on, the gathering of common memories and the growth of a common purpose, culminating in the knowledge which all alike brought back with them from the common ordeal of war that, to quote from Renan's famous definition of a nation, they had done great things together and desired to do more of them.

The historian who has mastered this material will be able to throw some light on those difficult questions: What is a nation? and What is nationality? He will be able, too, to make the meaning of our Commonwealth of Nations a little clearer to those of his fellow-citizens who are puzzled by the emphasis which Overseas statesmen have recently been laying on the 'national status' of the Dominions. He may even temper the not unnatural bewilderment with which foreign observers contemplate so queer a spectacle, for instance, as a brisk dispute between Dominion and United Kingdom delegates in the Assembly of the League of Nations. But that is not all. Nationalism is a new thing in the Dominions. It has yet to run its course. We cannot certainly foretell, however strong our belief may be, what spirit will inform it when it reaches its full power—the spirit of Mazzini or another's. But this at least is certain. If this great society of nations is to continue—its younger partners, remember, growing in those wide spaces so

much faster than the Motherland, that even in our own day their population may easily outstrip our own—there is nothing we can do at Oxford to promote that end more effectively than to foster a better knowledge of the history of the Dominions in this country, and thereby a better understanding of their character, their circumstances, and their ideals.

There is one aspect of Dominion nationalism with which this Chair is especially concerned. The consciousness of nationhood in the Dominions has greatly stimulated the interest of all their peoples in their past. But the histories of the Dominions, unlike their constitutions, are unwritten ; and they cannot yet be written, on a full scale and in keeping with modern standards of historical scholarship, because the preliminary research has not yet been done. The work has been begun indeed, and admirably begun, by the historians of the Dominion Universities ; and from year to year they are sending out a swelling stream of students who mean to devote themselves to building up the knowledge of their national history in the same fine pioneer-spirit in which their ancestors once cut their way through the trackless forest and cleared the untouched ground for cultivation. Now in this great undertaking Oxford is called to play a part. The materials on which these pioneers must work are divided. They exist in part in the Dominions, whose Governments are happily aware that the youth of a nation is no excuse for neglecting the records of its life. Every student of Canadian history owes an immeasurable debt to Dr. Doughty for his masterly handling of the Dominion Archives and for the invaluable publications of his Department : his example is being zealously followed in South Africa by Mr. Botha, the

Union Archivist; and similar work is being done in Australia by the Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament. But most of the other part of the material is in England, mainly in the Record Office and the British Museum. To England, therefore, the young historians of the Dominions are now coming in increasing numbers : and I know you will agree with me when I say that nowhere can they find a warmer welcome than at Oxford. I am trying myself to do something to meet their special needs by building up alongside the existing Beit Library of general Colonial History a Research Library which will aim at containing ultimately all the more important *published* sources, so that Overseas research students can work at these in term-time, with such guidance as the Beit Lecturer and myself can give them, and devote their vacations to the *unpublished* materials in London, where, if they are wise, they will quickly find their way to the hospitable work-rooms of the newly founded Institute of Historical Research.

I trust, too, that some of these Overseas research students will use the opportunity of residence at the centre of the Commonwealth to study other fields within its world-wide orbit than their own homelands. I regard it as a welcome sign that one Canadian student wrote a thesis this year for the degree of Bachelor of Letters on the Constitutional Development of the British West Indies, and that another is now working for our new Research Doctorate on the history of British Malaya. It is to be hoped, similarly, that students in this country will collaborate with their kinsmen from overseas in laying the foundations of Dominion history.

There is nothing revolutionary in the claim that the

problem of nationality in the Dominions should not be overlooked by students of history and politics at Oxford. It is merely an extension of a field already occupied. But I would go further. I would plead that no student of history and politics ought to leave this University without some knowledge of the record and the function of the British Commonwealth in Asia and in other parts of Africa than the Dominion in the South. For the second of the two transcendent political problems of our time is the Colour Problem. Behind the question of international relations looms the more difficult and no less insistent question of interracial relations. The world is one. Asia shared with Europe in the War: and Europe cannot live apart from her in peace. India, China, Japan are members, indeed, of the League of Nations; but are we not apt to regard the work of the League as primarily an effort to establish harmony between the white peoples of the world? And what if, while we labour at this task, the old familiar evils of ignorance and prejudice, of ruthless greed and arrogant ascendancy, are gathering strength beyond our limited horizon till, some far-off day, we wake to find ourselves confronted with another seemingly 'inevitable' conflict, but this time a conflict of colour, more terribly primitive in its impulses, more inexorable, more destructive than any of its predecessors, the authentic Armageddon, stamping out in blood and ruin the last hope of civilization? I am not trying to make any one's flesh creep—there is nothing, indeed, so hateful as thoughtless scaremongering on this theme—but unthinkable as such a conflict may seem, it is idle to suppose it could not happen. It might well happen if the peoples of the West allowed themselves to be convinced by dogmatic biologists that the ultimate relations

between the white and coloured races can only be a fight to the death for the survival of the fittest, or by cynics and materialists that a strong or civilized people can have no other genuine object in its dealings with a weak or backward people than to exploit it solely for its selfish gain. And it might well happen if the wisdom of Japan were beguiled by militarist dreams which have lost (let us hope) their charm in Europe and were perverted by those evil counsellors who tell her, in language now so bitterly familiar in the West, that 'to possess the Empire of the Pacific is to be master of the world'. And again it might well happen if Mr. Gandhi or his disciples could persuade the untutored multitudes of India that the East cannot profit by contact with the West, and that all Britain has done for their motherland has been Satan's doing. It is safe, I hope, to prophesy that none of these hypotheses will be fulfilled ; but even without them is it not conceivable that the world may drift into a race-schism through mere indifference and neglect ? Nature and circumstance have made the races different in more than in colour—different in religion, in philosophy, in experience and tradition and ideals : and these differences cannot be harmonized simply by wishing it so. They must be studied : they must, as far as possible, be understood.

We need not look far afield for the materials of study. The British Commonwealth, it has been well said, is a microcosm of the world. It cuts across the strata of humanity. It includes a part of every continent and a section of all the great families of mankind. As in the question of nationality, therefore, so in the question of colour, but on an even wider and more impressive scale, it presents the essential problems in actual operation : and in this field, as in the other, its long experience

has carried it some way, at any rate, towards their solution. Roughly, perhaps, and tentatively as yet, it bridges the gulf between Europe and Asia. Within its bounds more than three hundred million Asiatics are living side by side with Europeans. It may not be the happiest of happy families. Discontents, justifiable or otherwise, may be at work beneath the surface whose outcome cannot be foreseen. But the fact is there. These Asiatics and Europeans are at this hour living side by side, fellow-members of one political society, owning allegiance to a single Crown. And if this fact endures, if, as the years go by, the bridge across the gulf consolidates, if the political association becomes in time a genuine comradeship, yoking Europe and Asia in free service for their common weal, surely the longest and hardest stage will have been accomplished in the long, hard march towards the brotherhood of man. Is it anything less, then, than the duty of the rising generation to inform themselves by what process of history and under what conditions this fact has come about? And ought not a British University to help them to fulfil it?

I am sure, at any rate, that my friend, the Reader in Indian History—who will pardon, I know, this momentary intrusion of mine into the field in which he labours with such infectious zeal—will agree with me in wishing that the history of British rule in India were more generally and more fully studied here, and not only or mainly the military and, in its outward form alone, the constitutional history, but rather the development of the ideas which have inspired the British Raj, and especially the growth of a sense of responsibility towards the Indian people, and its effect on public opinion in Britain and on British administration in India.

The origin of this sense of responsibility may be found, I suppose, in that sudden renaissance of idealism with which the British people, on the morrow of the most damaging and humiliating disaster in their history, awoke from the long lethargy of the eighteenth century. Defeat may be a better moral tonic than victory; and in that interesting decade between the wars of the American and French Revolutions men like Burke and Wilberforce brought into politics the same new spirit which Wesley and Whitefield had brought into religion. Modern students of Warren Hastings's career may fairly point to exaggeration and injustice in Burke's advocacy of Indian grievances: but let it be remembered that he was rousing his countrymen, by necessarily violent means perhaps, to their first faint perception of the moral issues at stake in the government of India. Re-read his speeches of 1783 and 1785, and you will increase—if that is possible at Oxford—your reverence for that great political teacher. Note how clearly he recognizes the magnitude of our task in India, the immensity of its population, and the difficulty and delicacy of the situation that arises from the intrusion of Europe into that ancient civilization with its 'venerable priesthood', its 'nobility of great antiquity and renown', its merchants and bankers, its manufacturers and mechanics, and its 'millions of diligent tillers of the earth', the whole body 'infinitely diversified by manners, by religion, by hereditary employment, through all their possible combinations'. Note, too, how wisely he emphasizes the danger of entrusting to the same men the functions of government and the interests of trade: and how clearly he affirms the cardinal principle that the powers and privileges granted to his countrymen in India ought all to be exercised for the ultimate benefit

of the Indian people and are 'all in the strictest sense a *trust*'—the first public enunciation, I take it, of the modern doctrine of trusteeship. And note, finally, his stern reproof of the ignorance and apathy of Parliament. 'Let us do what we please to put India from our thoughts, we can do nothing to separate it from our public interest and our national reputation'.

It would be no less educative, surely, than interesting to watch the influence of this idea of trusteeship, once Burke had forced it on the British conscience, on the subsequent development of public opinion and official conduct—on Parliament's attempts to reform the administration of the East India Company, on the expansion of British rule, on the interpretation and the handling of the crisis of 1857 and the question of transferring political control entirely to the Crown, on the policy of a Cobden on the one hand, and a Disraeli on the other, and on the methods and the purpose of the greatest bureaucracy, to judge it not merely by the multitude of human beings in its charge, that the world has ever known.

Should our student of the Commonwealth stop there, for fear of coming too close abreast of contemporary politics and treading controversial ground? Or should he press on to the inauguration of the new régime in India? I think he will answer that question for himself. I think, if he studies the steady permeation of British rule in India, from Burke's day onwards, by the ideal Burke proclaimed, he will be caught up by the glamour of the story and will not rest, until, be it in work-time or in leisure, he has read its latest chapter and watched, with the anxious interest only his previous study could give him, the initiation of the policy of extending to the people of India the forms of political freedom or, as

I would rather put it, of political responsibility, which the people of Britain have fashioned, not without dust and heat, from the lessons of a long experience. He may judge it either way. He may think it an untimely abandonment of our trust or the inception of its last, its hardest, its crowning stage. But anyhow he will be able to contribute some measure of knowledge and thought—academic, it may be, and uninformed by personal experience of India, but better, surely, than blank ignorance and indifference—to the formation of the public opinion of his time on what may prove to be the most decisive issue of this century for the good or ill of mankind as a whole.

The Colour Problem is most urgent and, most critical in Asia. It is most difficult and morally most dangerous in Africa ; and for present purposes I mean by Africa that great Equatorial belt between the Sahara and the Zambesi—that vast primeval country, the birth-place, seemingly, of our race, yet to the great majority of men a dark, unknown, mysterious land ; a land of fabulous wealth from the days when Europe whispered of Ophir and Monomatapa to the days when Europe finds itself dependent on its palm-oil and its rubber and the countless other products of its teeming soil ; a land which has always tempted the explorer since, four centuries before our era, Hanno set sail from Carthage, and, passing the Pillars of Hercules and Cape Verde, came at last to the Gulf of Guinea and there beheld those hairy, savage men and women whom his interpreters told him were ‘gorillas’ ; the chosen land of glorious incredible romance, the home of the blameless Ethiopians who feasted with the gods, of those battles in the dawn between the pygmies and the cranes, of Presbyter John, of King Solomon’s Mines ;

a land of tropical extremes where Nature nourishes and kills so easily, where white men rise so high and fall so low, where the vileness in *Heart of Darkness* and the nobility in *Multitude and Solitude* can both be true to life; the homeland, first and last, of that swarming, fecund negro race, the most backward among the great races of mankind, ignorant, superstitious, brutal, if you will, but, like children, simple, happy, docile, and not without their special gifts of mind and body. . . Now it happens that a wider area of this land and a greater number of its peoples are included in the British Commonwealth than in any other political community. It falls to us, therefore, its European members, by what we do or leave undone, to take the predominant, indeed the decisive, part in settling, one way or another, the African question. For there is an African question. The world (I repeat the truism) is one. None of its peoples can live in isolation. And somehow or other, at the risk of disaster to all the world, no less ruinous because it might be primarily a moral disaster, the life of Africa, like that of Asia, must be harmonized with the life of the other continents. Here too, moreover, the course taken in the early years of this new age will probably determine the issue for centuries to come. Is it importunate to ask, then, that the rising generation should find among their busy hours a space in which to study what we have done in Africa and so to fit themselves to decide—for it will rest with them—what we shall do in Africa?

That some such study should be pursued, and preferably in the sober, impartial atmosphere of a University, seems to me imperative if only to counteract the increasing vogue of certain dangerous half-truths. There is a type of doctrinaire, who, when confronted with that

question, What have we done in Africa? is ready with a short reply. 'Nothing but harm', he will tell you; and if asked to enlarge on this assertion he narrates the story of British intercourse with Africa in two grim chapters. Chapter I is called 'The Slave-Trade'. It is a ghastly picture of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century brutality—the ruthless man-hunt on the Guinea coast—the horrors of the 'Middle Passage'—the sale of the human cargo in 'parcels' at the West Indian or North American ports, 'choice men' fetching £20 and upwards a head, the sick or feeble or 'much abused' lumped with little children and superfluous women and sold off cheap as 'refuse'—and at home in comfortable England British merchants batten on the trade and complacently protesting that for this negroid order of creation, so little higher than the animals, enslavement by a civilized race is positively a moral and a physical gain. And Chapter II is scarcely less appalling. Its title is 'Economic Imperialism'; and it displays the greed of Europe, with Britain to the fore, operating as injuriously in the nineteenth as in the eighteenth century on the welfare of Africa. Now and again its cruelty is naked and unashamed: and if as a rule it is outwardly less brutal and wears the disguise of a peaceful and mutually advantageous trade, its effects on the body and soul of the negro are no less destructive than the Slave traffic itself. Lawless adventurers are soon nose down along the path to wealth which the now forbidden slave-traders had trodden. Instead of the chain and the whip, the white man brings the black man now, in exchange for his little store of rubber or ivory or gold, a gun and powder with which to kill his fellows and poisonous 'Trade Spirits' with which to madden and to rot himself. And, presently, as the century draws

on, the Governments of Europe are seen feverishly competing to include as much as they can of this rich field within their own exclusive control, till at last all Central Africa is 'partitioned' among them, the largest share falling, as in the Slave Trade, to ourselves. And the moral of the tale is this—Economic exploitation has been, and is now, the only purpose in our dealings with Central Africa.

It is a terrible story, and, *as far as it goes*, it is true. But I would like our hypothetical student not to take it as he finds it in propagandist literature, but to build it up for himself from the materials available. And of these there are plenty, even though the *arcana imperii* of recent years are locked up in the Colonial Office—the earlier official documents in the Record Office, Parliamentary Papers and Debates, Reports of Public Commissions and Private Committees, records of missionary societies, autobiographies, letters, newspapers, and so forth. From these let him peruse that half-true story, not skimming too lightly over any of the black spots on its pages. But let him also put together the other half of the truth. Let him study in Africa as in India the growth of the doctrine of trusteeship.

The starting-point will be the same: for, at the same time as Burke was declaring the new purpose of British rule in India, William Wilberforce, that rare example of the saint in politics, was bringing the question of the abolition of the Slave Trade, which had been agitated for some time past in humanitarian circles and especially in the Society of Friends, to the forefront of the political stage, forcing it by his eloquence, his industry, his almost irresistible sincerity, on the uneasy conscience of the House of Commons, and rallying to its support not only the warm heart of Fox but also the cool head of

his intimate friend, the young Prime Minister himself. It was a little more than seven years since Burke had spoken in Parliament of Britain's 'trust' in India when Pitt asserted the same claim for Africa in a speech which such expert critics as Fox and Grey and Windham declared to be 'one of the most extraordinary displays of eloquence they had ever heard'. You remember the historic scene? The debate had been long drawn out and the night was far gone when Pitt began his closing speech. As he reached his peroration the first rays of an April dawn shone through the windows of the House. It gave the orator a noble metaphor with which to point his ending. If they listened to the voice of reason and duty, he told the Commons, if, by a prompt and total abolition of the Slave Trade, they made atonement for their long and cruel injustice towards Africa, if they allowed her the opportunity and the hope of attaining to the same blessings which they themselves, under Providence, enjoyed, then they might live to see the dawn of civilization breaking over Africa, one day to illumine and invigorate that immense continent from end to end.

*Nos . . . primus equis Oriens afflavit anhelis ;
illic sera rubens accendit lumina Vesper.*

The sun was to rise many times over Westminster before this call was answered. The French Revolution and the European War thrust the question of Abolition into the background of men's minds, and of Pitt's among them. But from May 1, 1807, as far as British subjects throughout the world were concerned, the Slave Trade was 'utterly abolished, prohibited, and declared to be unlawful' by Act of Parliament. Twenty-six years later, as you know, Slavery itself was suppressed in every part of the British Commonwealth.

Our student will discover, then, that the first chapter of the British record in Africa closes, and the second chapter opens, with a moral revolution. British public opinion has acknowledged that it lies not in man's prerogative to pronounce the curse of Canaan. The doctrine that the black race was created to be the 'living implements' of labour for the white is dead. The doctrine that the white race has a duty towards the black has been born. And a tradition has been created of which not only a handful of humanitarians but the rank and file of the British people are proud. Just as the cutlers of Sheffield had declared for Abolition in 1789, although, as they admitted, it might injure their industry, so the cotton spinners of Lancashire in the 'sixties cheerfully endured the interruption of the cotton supply and the unemployment and hardship it involved, because it served the cause of freedom for the slaves of North America. But Africa is far from England. Deeds can be done in the dark there, unseen by Englishmen at home. And our student will find, as I have said, that half-true story to be half the truth. He will find the fortune-hunter busily at work in the slave-hunter's shoes. But he will find, too, the principles, for which Englishmen at home were willing to sacrifice so much, being upheld by two groups, especially, of their countrymen in Africa, partly through an instinctive sense of justice and humanity, partly, and in growing measure as time goes on, through a deliberate acceptance of the doctrine of trusteeship.

These two groups are the missionaries and the officials. The fortune-hunters might often be first in the field, but close on their heels and sometimes in advance of them went the preachers of the Gospel,

no less enterprising, no less persevering, facing as coolly the dangers of disease and violent death, though it was only the souls of the negroes they were after and not their gold and ivory. There were missionaries, it may be, who through ignorance or bigotry or tactlessness or worse did more harm than good: but on the whole, whether in Darkest Africa or among the defenceless islanders of the Pacific, their work was of immeasurable value not only for the welfare of the people they served but also for the good name of the Commonwealth. It would be an unhistorical account of British dealings with the Pacific which made no mention of Patesson and Selwyn. It would be a travesty of our record in Africa which did not set in the forefront the name of David Livingstone. Nor were missionaries fighting a lonely battle for the natives. They were sure of warm support at the Colonial Office, especially during James Stephen's long career as its permanent chief. Their influence, indeed, on Government policy in the second quarter of the nineteenth century was actually too powerful because it was too one-sided. It was not in the best interests of South Africa, black as well as white, that Glenelg, for instance, should have been persuaded that no white man could do right and no black man wrong. And a similar charge might be brought against the influence of the missionaries in alienating Government opinion from the early schemes of colonization in Australia and New Zealand. But it was better to err on the side of the angels, to emphasize even to unwise extremes the duty of trusteeship, than to abandon the tradition altogether and drift back into the criminal indifference of earlier days. And if ministers in England were generally true to the tradition, so were their officials in Africa.

For officials in the end were needed, in Central Africa as well as in the South. During the greater part of the nineteenth century the British Government abstained as far as possible from adding fresh territories to an Empire which already seemed too vast. But in the 'eighties the policy of annexation or, more strictly, of the institution of protectorates was suddenly and vigorously taken up. Into the causes of this our student should look closely. He will find once more that there is a measure of truth in the assertion that the motive was selfish: that not Britain only, but all the leading States of Europe, had realized the bearing on their economic future of the fact that Tropical Africa was capable of producing an almost immeasurable quantity of certain raw materials which modern civilization could scarcely do without; and that in the ensuing 'scramble' there was more haste and rivalry than might be expected of a wholly disinterested pursuit. But, as he digs a little deeper, he will come upon other facts. He will learn, first, that annexation to the British Commonwealth was not seldom asked for, spontaneously and genuinely, by the rulers of the peoples concerned. He will read, for example, the historic reply of the shrewd Basuto chief to Governor Wodehouse when he was told that his request for annexation had been granted. 'I have become old: therefore I am glad that my people should have been allowed to rest and to lie under the large folds of the flag of England before I am no more.' He will learn, secondly, that a policy of annexation was almost always supported, nay, sometimes passionately demanded, by the missionaries. And why? Because only by annexation, only by the assumption of direct responsibility for the maintenance of law and order by a humane European

Government, could the native be protected from the private European fortune-hunter. And thirdly he will learn how obstinately reluctant British Governments were to yield to these appeals; how early and easily, had they wished, they could have planted 'the flag of England' across Africa from sea to sea; but how at last, when other Powers, with Germany in the van, began to peg out their claims, they could no longer stand aloof.

And so the student will come again to the threshold of our own age: and on the African as on the Asiatic question he will find new ideas awakened by the War, or rather, old ideas reanimated, crystallized, expanded. He will hear men saying that we stand in Africa as we stood in India generations back; that a similar task, though more difficult perhaps and more protracted, awaits us there; that the time is coming when all British Central Africa will be consolidated like the Indian Empire in one great political system, with an African Civil Service ranking in position and prestige and opportunity with the Indian Civil Service and attracting to its ranks that British genius for administrative tutelage which India, as we hope, will cease progressively to need. And may I express a wish, in passing, that Oxford, which takes a notable part in the preliminary training of cadets for the Indian, Egyptian, and Sudanese Civil Services, might also be associated, in some degree, with the Colonial Civil Service? But more important than the formulation of these schemes of political organization is the acceptance by the Great Powers of the world of a new principle by which the government of backward peoples is henceforth to be controlled—the principle of the Mandate. A new principle, did I say? A principle, surely, as old as the days of Burke and

Wilberforce. For the principle of the Mandate is simply the doctrine of trusteeship—the doctrine that implies (1) that a native territory must not be regarded as the private estate of its European rulers; that the economic development of it is undertaken for the benefit of the world at large; and therefore that the subjects of other States shall be as free to share in its development and trade as the subjects of the ruling State—i. e. the principle of the Open Door: (2) that the natives, on their part, must not be regarded as so much labour-power for their rulers' plantations, nor as so much 'cannon-fodder' for their armies, nor as so many clients for their liquor-trade; but in spirit, if not yet in political capacities and duties, their fellow-citizens, as free as they themselves to traffic in their property or labour: and (3) that not only should their moral and material interests be upheld against all other interests that conflict with them, but positive efforts should be made to raise them by wise education and in other ways to a higher and wider life. And since on all these heads, with one or two exceptions, with hesitations and backslidings here and there, British ministers and British officials have observed the doctrine, Britain can claim to have been a Mandatory State for many years past.

But if the doctrine of trusteeship is no new thing in the British Commonwealth, its solemn affirmation in the Treaty of Versailles and its detailed exposition in the Covenant of the League of Nations and the texts of the Mandates is a new and a great thing—on paper. How much it will mean in practice depends primarily on us. We first upheld the doctrine, we must lead the way in its application, more consciously and resolutely now, at this great turning-point in history, than ever

before. That is why, I repeat, it seems to me essential that the rising generation should not entirely neglect to study its development and so to grasp its importance and its difficulty. It is difficult, so difficult indeed, that Mr. Worldlywiseman may be tempted to warn us that it is really not a practical proposition among imperfect men in this workaday world, and that nothing will prevent the strong from pushing the weak against the wall. Well, we have our answer to that. It was no unpractical dreamer, inexperienced in realities, who said that 'the essential points of a sound Imperial policy admit of being embodied in this one statement, that . . . our relations with the various races who are subjects of the King of England should be founded on the granite rock of the Christian code.' Those words were written by Lord Cromer.

I have gone far afield and brought some strange figures on to our academic stage—*habitants* from the St. Lawrence, Boers from the *veld*, practitioners of dyarchy from India, negroes from the Tropics. And if I ask that Oxford should make itself more familiar with these and others like them and with the problems they represent, it is because they are fellow-members with us in one Commonwealth and because, if for lack of scientific preparation we fail to solve those problems, this Commonwealth will fail to fulfil the great purpose for which it exists. A policy of excluding its outer peoples from our field of education would seem to me to be analogous to the policy, often advocated but never, happily, with success, of withdrawing our political activities within the limits of these islands, of bidding our kinsmen overseas to break away and live alone, of

abandoning Asia and Africa to their fate. And I would dismiss the thought of such a policy in the spirit in which Burke dismissed the thought of leaving India: 'There we are: there we are placed by the Sovereign Disposer; and we must do the best we can in our situation. The situation of man is the preceptor of his duty.'

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PRINTED IN ENGLAND
AT THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS







C047913666

